

Dear Committee Members:

Attached are my comments regarding the Common Core and Smarter Balance Assessment reflecting on the testimony received to date by the House Subcommittee on Common Core, published material and media reporting.

I plan on attending the meeting on September 4.

My comments are rooted in forty years of management experience, five years post retirement teaching and over twenty years of seriously investigating education policy and practice and cognitive science since my two adopted children are both special needs.

As a lead auditor for the ISO series of business standards with qualifications in Total Quality Management, Quality Operating Systems, Statistical Process Control, Lean Manufacturing and Learning Organizations I am well versed in the benefits of standards, their implementation and compliance assessment.

Thank you for your attention.

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The More Things Change, The More They Stay The Same

Common Core State Standards¹ (CCSS) and Smarter Balance Assessment² (SBA) represent tools that *may* be used to improve learning outcomes for children.

The Common Core is a toolbox full of well defined learning expectations that teachers *may* use to frame curriculum and classroom practice. The teacher *may* decide what, where, when and how to use these expectations based upon the contextual and intellectual diversity presented by the individual students placed in their care.

Smarter Balance Assessment is a rapid feedback diagnostic tool that *may* be used to assess learning of teacher and student linked to the outcomes chosen by the teacher from the Common Core toolbox. Emphasized is depth of knowledge and understanding³ versus content and coverage required by the tests used today.

¹ www.corestandards.org. "The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn."

² www.smarterbalanced.org

³ Grant Wiggins. Understanding by Design. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Cagh0H7PPA>

I say “*may*” since how the standards and assessments are to be used is something being determined by politicians, the Michigan Department of Education⁴ and Intermediate School District administrations, not the teacher in the classroom. The folks that actually do the day to day work of learning are excluded from the what, when, where and how decisions.

But here in Michigan the use of the Common Core and Smarter Balance Assessment has been delayed and potentially derailed by Representative Tom McMillin’s state budget amendment defunding the implementation of the Common Core.

There have been several hearings in Lansing to receive testimony from Common Core supporters and opponents. Those opposed are represented by three distinct groups, academic specialists disputing content and method, those maneuvering for political power and the conspiracy theorists concerned about mind control and big government takeovers. Common Core supporters present fact and concrete reference while attempting to address misinformed opinion and the distorted interpretation of expert analysis. Loss of local control is deeply feared, despite the fact that local control doesn’t exist today. Proposal A put an end to that a long time ago⁵.

Meanwhile bureaucracies and publishers have been busy doing what they have always done best – creating volumes of detailed and very specific instructions on how the classroom teacher and the student are to use the standards, the what, when, where and how instructions that fit so well in the traditional factory model classroom. This is “the soft bigotry of low expectations”⁶. What better way to insure that teacher and student will never be challenged.

Thus the concepts of depth over breadth and learning for understanding⁷, which are integral to CCSS and SBA, are, like all past efforts at reform, morphed into the traditional mass production factory model of education we have today⁸. The CCSS and SBA may be used only in ways dictated by academic and administrative bureaucracies. The teachers and their students have little voice in this process despite teacher participation in the creation of CCSS and SBA!

Worse yet these same bureaucracies, at the behest of political pressure, are rushing forward to attach the assessments to evaluations of teacher performance in order to address their fixation on accountability.⁹ “We’re starting testing on standards we aren’t teaching, with a curriculum we don’t have on computers that don’t exist.” Apparently some people really believe there is such a thing as

⁴ http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-28753_64839_64848---,00.html

⁵ “A major effect of the Proposal has been the switch from local control of policy, program and operational spending in Michigan’s schools, to a major role in the control of local school operation for state level players.” <http://www.educ.msu.edu/epfp/meet/01-26-04propa.htm>

⁶ Michael John Gerson

⁷ Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers addresses ABNY members about the newly adopted Common Core State Standards for math and English language arts. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5KM9i8E3iw>

⁸ “Changing Education Paradigms” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcdGpL4U>

⁹ Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers addresses ABNY members about the newly adopted Common Core State Standards for math and English language arts. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5KM9i8E3iw>

“Instant Pudding” and that we can implement, assess and evaluate for outcomes all at the same time. They should carefully read the pudding box¹⁰!

The entrenched bureaucracies maintain their control over education policy and practice while the people that actually do the work are excluded from the process. It doesn't help that politicians have placed a target on every Michigan teacher's back. The only way CCSS and SBA will succeed is if teachers and their students have ownership and input. That will happen only if leadership is willing to let go of power and begin to trust the people that do the work.

We don't have to accept, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”¹¹

¹⁰ J. K. Bakken, VP Ford Motor Company as referenced by Edwards W. Deming.

¹¹ Alphonse Karr. *Les Guêpes*, "[plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose](#)"—"the more it changes, the more it's the same thing"